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RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1352

RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 0370

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SUBJECT: PACIFIC REGIONAL INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK (RIF) -

AN UPDATE

REF: A. 06 SUVA 434

1B. 06 SUVA 490 (AND PREVIOUS)

Work resumes on Pacific agency regional restructuring

11. (U) The Pacific Plan Action Committee (PPAC) met at Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) headquarters in Suva on Feb. 14. The agenda included an update on a proposed restructuring of regional technical organizations, the Regional Institutional Framework (RIF) (ref A). Embassy Suva was invited to the RIF portion of the agenda, which follows from a decision at last October's PIF Leaders Meeting in Nadi (ref B) to defer action on the RIF pending a thorough review. The USG has a particular interest because of its memberships in the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the South

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Pacific Regional Environmental Program (SPREP). A restructuring proposal from last year would have amalgamated the SPC, SPREP, and several other technical agencies under one SPC-like umbrella organization. The USG raised concerns in particular about financial, legal, and efficiency aspects of that concept.

Pangalinan to manage the process; all options open

12. (U) PPAC has hired Lou Pangalinan, the highly respected former SecGen of the SPC and a U.S. citizen of Guam heritage, as "manager" for the review in the lead-up to the next PIF Leaders Meeting to be held in Tonga in October 2007. Pangalinan's first deadline, though, is the next PPAC meeting in early June. Second deadline will be the pre-Forum PPAC meeting in September. She stressed that the RIF concept is intended to achieve whatever regional arrangements are most appropriate to implement the agreed "Pacific Plan." No decisions have been made. Topics that must be addressed in detail include: what needs fixing in the current arrangements? if integration of regional agencies is proposed, what is the clear rationale? what are the legal implications for each current agency and for an amalgamation? what are the financial implications? and what would an amalgamated governance structure look like?

A transparent and inclusive process

13. (U) Pangalinan stressed her commitment to have the process of attempting to answer those questions be entirely

transparent and inclusive, with all interested nations, territories, and agencies having every opportunity to contribute. Since Pangalinan's work plan is still under discussion, details are not yet available. She will distribute the work plan ASAP. One way she intends to communicate is via a RIF internet discussion forum in which all parties can participate. She will hire staff, including lawyers, to work through the various issues. The goal is to have a "consensus" proposal for Pacific leaders to discuss and bless in October, with the governing councils of all affected agencies then to consider the proposal and make decisions before the end of 2007.

Some criticism from the region

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¶4. (U) Pangalinan's brief overview generated several comments from PPAC members. A Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) representative expressed strong criticism of last year's RIF proposal that would have split the FFA into a policy/negotiating element to be integrated into the PIF and technical elements to be amalgamated under the SPC umbrella. The FFA rep argued that fisheries functions and expertise must stay united if the region is to negotiate successfully with "big powers" like the U.S., China, Japan, and the EU. Representatives from Samoa and the FSM added their concerns about splitting the FFA, expressed skepticism about the need for change, and suggested, in effect, that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." On the other hand, the New Zealand rep advised that every organization needs an assessment occasionally. A Fiji rep asked all parties to be "open minded" and suggested some may have to sacrifice sacred cows. Pangalinan's response to that series of comments was that change is never easy, and the RIF process needs to ensure any proposal is well-informed and reflects a regional consensus.

Comment

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¶5. (U) During a coffee break, we congratulated Pangalinan on her new responsibilities and confirmed that she is well aware of USG issues re the RIF, recalling ref A themes. With her background, we are very confident she will value USG input to the work plan.

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